Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2012/02/21 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000201010006-5

STAT

A1

WASHINGTON POST
2 March 1987

Gates to Withdraw As CIA Nominee

Reagan's Choice Facing Senate Rejection

By Lou Cannon and Bob Woodward
Washington Post Staff Writers

Robert M. Gates will withdraw as President Reagan's nominee as director of central intelligence this week, according to well-informed administration and congressional sources.

One of these sources said Gates had arrived at the decision "without much prodding" in the wake of warnings from Republican congressional leaders that his nomination was likely to be rejected by the Senate.

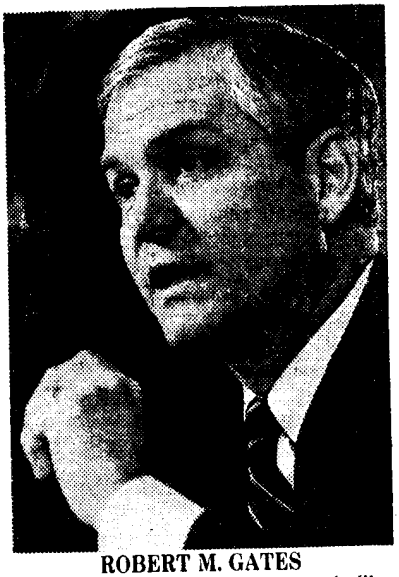
The Republican leaders, four of whom met with Reagan on Friday, said that the fight over Gates' confirmation on the Senate floor would focus additional attention on the Iran-contra affair at the same time that the administration is trying to make a fresh start with a new White House team headed by former senator Howard H. Baker Jr. (R-Tenn.).

Former senator Paul Laxalt (R-Nev.), a close friend of the president who was instrumental in the selection of Baker, said yesterday on ABC News' "This Week With David Brinkley" that the nomination has "the smell of Irangate" on it.

"Quickly, it must be done quickly," said one well-placed source. "Gates is a negative symbol and the situation at the CIA is critical and has to be transformed into a positive symbol."

The sources said that means finding a nominee who has professional intelligence experience, stature, unquestioned integrity and with no role in the Iran-contra affair, which is expected to be the subject of investigations for most of this year by the independent counsel and congressional committees.

Within the Central Intelligence Agency, some officials expressed urgency about Gates' withdrawal in hopes of protecting the agency from what one source said could be a "re-



ROBERT M. GATES
. . . viewed as a "negative symbol"

visitation of the Church committee," a reference to the Senate committee that investigated intelligence abuses in the 1970s.

A number of key people in the Directorate of Operations, the elite clandestine arm of the CIA, were involved in the Iran arms sales transactions or the private White House support effort to the Nicaraguan contras. The directorate can expect intensive scrutiny in the coming months.

A senior administration source said "it is crucial to have a new CIA director who can credibly investigate and clean up any remains of Iran-contra, not a director who himself is the subject of the investigations."

Gates, the agency's deputy director, took over as acting director of the CIA in December after William J. Casey underwent brain surgery for removal of a cancerous tumor. Subsequently, after Casey resigned and Baker rejected a presidential overture to replace him, Reagan nominated Gates. If confirmed, Gates, 43, would have become the youngest CIA director in the agency's 40-year history.

The nomination came under immediate fire from members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, some of whom have sharply criticized Gates for failing to be forthcoming about all his knowledge and suspicions in the Iran-contra affair.

Criticism of Gates stems largely from his failure to ensure that Casey's Nov. 21 testimony to the Senate committee was complete. Gates had an important role in preparing that testimony, which sources said describes an operation that does not resemble what was known within the CIA at the time.

Senators are particularly distressed that Casey, Gates and the CIA did not alert them to the possible diversion of money from the Iran arms sales to aid the contras.

A senior administration official said yesterday that there was "a consensus in the White House" to avoid a fight over the nomination, although the president was not personally critical of Gates. Officials said that Gates, while wanting to be CIA director, had come to the same conclusion and would withdraw his name.

"We're not angry with Bob Gates—we're dealing with practical political realities," the senior official said, and on Saturday, White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said "the president stands behind the nomination." On Saturday a CIA spokesman said that reports the nomination would be withdrawn are "totally false, totally without foundation." Yesterday an agency spokesman stood behind that statement.

In the Senate committee, which is considering Gates' nomination and is expected to hear closed-door testimony from him Wednesday, a number of key Republicans this weekend said Gates would not be confirmed. One called the nomination "stillborn," and another said that "Gates could not be reconfirmed as deputy" because committee members, especially the Republicans, are so anxious to move away from the Iran-contra affair.

Sources said that no decision would be reached on the next nominee until Gates withdraws. Possible choices mentioned by administration and congressional sources include Brent Scowcroft, a retired

Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2012/02/21 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000201010006-5

Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2012/02/21 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000201010006-5

Air Force general, national security adviser to President Gerald R. Ford and a member of the Tower commission that has just completed its report on the Iran-contra affair; FBI Director William H. Webster, whose 10-year term as head of the FBI expires next year, and Casey's first two CIA deputies, John N. McMahon and Bobby R. Inman, both of whom are advocates of limited use of covert action. Even former senator John G. Tower (R-Tex.), who headed the commission that harshly criticized the administration last week, had been mentioned.

Sources said a Scowcroft nomination is unlikely because of prospective opposition from Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger and Secretary of State George P. Shultz. Weinberger and Shultz opposed the sale of arms to Iran, but the report said they had "simply distanced themselves from the program" and did not do all they could to stop it. Weinberger, especially, was said to resent this conclusion. Scowcroft said yesterday he does not expect to be offered the job.

Said one Republican senator, "The White House now has to come up with the moral equivalent of Howard Baker for the CIA."

Staff researcher Barbara Feinman contributed to this report.

Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2012/02/21 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000201010006-5